



Fast Facts

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

BREASTFEEDING

The United States Department of Health and Human Services has identified breastfeeding promotion as a high priority health objective for the nation. The 2010 health objectives set a goal of increasing the proportion of women who breastfeed their babies to 75 percent in the early postpartum period, 50 percent at 6 months of age, and 25 percent at 1 year old.

In 1998, 80 percent of California mothers chose to breastfeed at the time of hospital discharge. Although this percentage exceeds the 2010 health objective, only 44 percent of California mothers chose to exclusively breastfeed. This means that more than half of the mothers who chose to breastfeed were already supplementing with formula prior to hospital discharge. Given that early formula supplementation leads to a downward spiral of a decreasing milk supply and an increasing reliance upon formula, too few California women breastfeed beyond the first few weeks after birth. According to the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, in 1993 only 27 percent of the women who initiated breastfeeding in the hospital were still breastfeeding nine weeks after birth.

In California, breastfeeding rates vary widely by region. In 1998, the percent of newborns exclusively breastfed at hospital discharge ranged from 22 percent in Imperial County to 85 percent in Marin, Nevada, and Trinity counties. Counties with low initiation rates tend to be in the Central Valley and high initiation rates tend to be in the coastal and mountain regions of California.

Benefits of Breastfeeding

The benefits of breastfeeding for infants are:

- Human milk provides a boost to the immune system. Breast milk contains antibodies specific to illnesses encountered by each mother and baby.
- Infants who are exclusively breastfed for at least four months are half as likely as formula fed infants to have ear infections in the first year of life. Otitis media (middle ear infection) is three to four times more prevalent in formula fed infants.
- Breastfeeding reduces the incidence and severity of bacterial infections, such as meningitis, lower respiratory infections, and bacteremia in infants. Breastfed infants have an 80 percent decreased risk for lower respiratory infections. Formula fed infants in the United States have a ten-fold risk of being hospitalized for any bacterial infection.

- Breastfeeding may reduce the risk for certain childhood cancer, such as lymphoma.
- In several large studies, children who had been breastfed had a small advantage over those who had been formula fed when given a variety of cognitive and neurological tests, including measures of IQ.
- Recent research suggests that breastfeeding may play a significant role in reducing childhood obesity. In 1997, researchers found that the longer mothers breastfed their children, the less likely the children would be overweight or obese. Also, if mothers breastfed their children for only three to five months, a 35 percent reduction was found in obesity in the children.
- Lack of breastfeeding is a risk factor for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Exclusive breastfeeding for at least two months protects susceptible children from Type 1 insulin dependent diabetes mellitus.

The benefits of breastfeeding for mothers are:

- Breastfeeding reduces the risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and osteoporosis.
- Breastfeeding helps mothers recover from childbirth.
- Exclusive breastfeeding generally delays ovulation (and menstruation) by 20 to 30 weeks and can be an important factor in child spacing.
- Breastfeeding promotes maternal confidence.

The benefits of breastfeeding for society are:

- Breastfeeding is economical and cost-effective. If a woman breastfeeds her infant, the family saves approximately \$855 for the cost of formula feeding in the first year.
- Mothers of breastfed infants require less time off from work to care for sick children and make fewer visits to the pediatrician. It has been estimated that two to four billion health care dollars could be saved annually in the United States if all women breastfed their infants for as little as 12 weeks.
- If the Healthy People 2010 goal of a national breastfeeding rate of 50 percent during an infant's first six months of age is met, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program would save \$9.3 million in lower food costs each month.

Breastfeeding Promotion

In 1997, DHS released the report *Breastfeeding: Investing in California's Future*, which includes a review of the scientific research on the benefits of breastfeeding, a

comparison of California's breastfeeding rates with national goals, and recommendations from the California Breastfeeding Promotion Advisory Committee to DHS. (The Executive Summary is located on the DHS/Primary Care and Family Health Web site at www.dhs.ca.gov.) In 1999, this report won a national gold award for excellence in public health communications.

Among the twenty recommendations highlighted in the report, the California Breastfeeding Promotion Advisory Committee identified the following as the top three priorities:

1. Ensure that all mothers have access to culturally appropriate breastfeeding information and professional lactation services, especially in communities with high birth rates and low prevalence of breastfeeding.
2. Develop an overriding policy to be governed by the state of California in which all health care institutions and health plans that provide maternal and child health services will facilitate breastfeeding for all mothers and infants, including those with special needs.
3. Facilitate integration of appropriate and culturally relevant breastfeeding training into the curriculum of health-related professional schools throughout the state to ensure that health professionals are technically and culturally competent in delivering breastfeeding services.

DHS's Key Accomplishments

Following the release of the Department's report, DHS has taken substantial action to increase breastfeeding promotion efforts in California, including a 1997-1999 DHS Strategic Plan for Breastfeeding Promotion. Key accomplishments include:

- In 1997, DHS developed a Breastfeeding Promotion Policy to ensure that all programs' activities support the Department's position to promote, protect, and support breastfeeding among all Californians as the most healthy and preferred method of infant feeding for at least the first year of life. DHS established two lactation rooms in 1997 and a third in 1999.
- In 1998, the Medi-Cal Managed Care Division issued a policy letter to all contracted health plans clarifying their responsibilities for breastfeeding promotion and support services. This directive is a tremendous step forward in improving breastfeeding promotion and support services, not just for Medi-Cal managed care beneficiaries, but for all women and infants in California.
- In 1998, DHS incorporated breastfeeding data reports into Healthy California 2000 and Health Data Summaries for California Counties, and will include breastfeeding incidence data in future County Health Status Profiles reports.

- In 1998, DHS implemented a multi-million dollar breastfeeding media campaign that included television and radio spots addressing the three specific barriers to breastfeeding: 1) embarrassment; 2) busy schedules; and 3) lack of family support.
- In 1999, DHS developed a white paper, *Breastfeeding and Early Childhood Development*, to assist local public health programs in developing breastfeeding support programs.
- In 1999, DHS distributed a letter to all general acute care hospital administrators requesting they review their hospital policies related to breastfeeding promotion and support, and enclosed a booklet of model hospital breastfeeding policies.
- In 1999, the Director of DHS requested that all local health officers designate a breastfeeding coordinator for their public health jurisdictions.

Current DHS Breastfeeding Promotion Efforts

DHS is currently in the process of finalizing a DHS Strategic Plan for Breastfeeding Promotion for 2000 to 2002. As part of this plan, DHS will:

- Develop a section in the Medi-Cal Manual of Criteria for hospital-grade electric pumps to clarify benefits for electric breast pumps, and provide a rate increase for banked human milk, manual pumps/double pump kits, and personal pumps.
- Continue to work toward reducing the barriers for employees to continue breastfeeding after returning to work by investigating the procurement of electric pumps for the workplace.
- Develop model WIC breastfeeding policies to standardize minimum levels of breastfeeding promotion and support services in each local WIC agency in California.
- Survey all hospitals with labor and delivery units in California to identify breastfeeding policies and practices.
- Develop and distribute a report providing hospital-specific breastfeeding initiation rates.
- Survey neonatologists regarding attitudes and practices of prescribing banked human milk for premature infants with special needs.
- Develop an educational packet for physicians that addresses common concerns regarding the use of banked human milk for infants.

Breastfeeding Legislation in California

- In 1999, Assembly Bill 532 allowed the procurement, processing, distribution, or use of human milk for human consumption to constitute the rendition of a service and not a sale of human milk. This law provides similar provisions for banked human milk as provisions for blood products.
- In 1998, Assembly Concurrent Resolution 155 encouraged the state of California and California employers to support and encourage the practice of breastfeeding by striving to accommodate the needs of employees and ensuring that employees are provided with adequate facilities for breastfeeding their children.
- In 1997, Assembly Bill 157 authorized a mother to breastfeed her child in public.
- In 1995, Assembly Bill 977 required general acute care hospitals and specialized hospitals that provide birthing services to make breastfeeding information available to new mothers. Hospitals have the option of providing a trained consultant to educate mothers or directing them to outside sources for information.

Assembly Bill 977 also required DHS to include breastfeeding promotion in its public awareness campaigns. DHS currently promotes breastfeeding through several programs, including WIC, which provides nutrition education and supplemental food to breastfeeding mothers, and Children's Medical Services, which supports mothers in breastfeeding during health visits for their infants and young children.

Contact Information

For additional information about DHS's breastfeeding promotion efforts, contact Carol Chase, chief of the Training, Breastfeeding, and Education Services Section of the WIC Branch, at (916) 928-8888 or at cchase1@dhs.ca.gov.